

**Talking Points**  
**Announcement of Mississippi Coast Housing Director**  
**4:30 p.m., Thursday, August 28, 2008**  
**Gulfport**

I want to begin today with good news and follow it up with even better news.

As of close of business on Monday, August 25, 2008, the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency reported there were 2,763 FEMA travel trailers and mobile homes still occupied in the three coastal counties.

And there were 2,759 cottages occupied in three coastal counties.

MEMA tells me that as of today, the number of people living in cottages has surpassed the number of people in FEMA travel trailers and mobile homes.

To those of us who've been working hard to help the Gulf Coast and the rest of Mississippi recover from Hurricane Katrina, this is a real milestone, and a sign of significant progress.

But we also know that more work remains if we are to achieve our goal – which I identified in the early days after the storm – of rebuilding the Coast bigger and better.

We know permanent housing – affordable, workforce housing and rental units for Mississippi families – remains the top priority in recovery, rebuilding and renewal.

I want to compliment the Mississippi Development Authority and its Disaster Recovery Unit, who work diligently to manage and administer multi-billion-dollar housing programs that did not exist before August 29, 2005.

Thousands of people have benefited from these programs, which are funded mostly with federal dollars, and thousands more will benefit when various programs reach full speed.

And, that's the second piece of good news I want to announce today.

I have appointed former Biloxi Mayor Gerald Blessey as Mississippi Coast Housing Director in what I see as a key, strong, supportive role designed to facilitate progress in post-Katrina housing recovery.

Tremendous resources have been devoted to restoring and rebuilding housing on the Gulf Coast. While a lot of progress has been made, it hasn't been fast enough. As we approach the third anniversary of Katrina and a new critical phase of recovery, it is essential that we continue to build the team that is already working hard to get more housing into service as quickly as possible.

Gerald has agreed to be on that team. As a native of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, a former mayor, state legislator, businessman, and involved member of the community, Gerald has a unique perspective on what it takes to get things done.

I want to emphasize that Gerald Blessey didn't ask for this job. I drafted him because I believe he has the credentials needed to help facilitate the vital job of housing recovery.

His assignment, functioning through the Mississippi Development Authority, is to work with local nonprofit agencies, governments, advocates, and other organizations to speed up development and construction of affordable workforce housing and rental units on the Coast.

By continuing to work together as a team, by bringing together all of the component parts, we can achieve the goal.

I'll ask Gerald to make some comments and then we'll be happy to take your questions.

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